

Attachment 3: Justification for the Commerce Data Advisory Council

Through the *Open for Business* agenda, the Department of Commerce has begun to view its own data assets from an organizational perspective. Commerce's bureaus share a set of core principles related to data management. Each bureau is committed to make the Department's economic, demographic, scientific, and environmental data easy to find, access, use, and combine. The Department's bureaus want to develop partnerships with other government agencies and the private sector to improve data interoperability and dissemination—while maintaining data integrity and closely safeguarding data confidentiality, personal privacy, and economic security.

To shape and operationalize this enterprise, the Department will hire a Chief Data Officer (CDO). The CDO will draw on knowledge of data science, modern technology, and public policy to accomplish the data strategy and establish a plan for the Department that leverages bureaus' data assets and develops collaborative practices with federal, state, local, and tribal agencies, and the private sector to deliver value to the public. Secretary Pritzker has determined that establishing the Commerce Data Advisory Council (C-DAC) will ensure the Department receives ongoing advice and recommendations to help shape data management across the Department.

Considering the challenges involved in making more data available – and available in more useful ways – Commerce would benefit considerably from the expertise and experiences of people who have already identified and successfully addressed these challenges. Private sector businesses are making more data available and making better use of it. Several state and local governments are already much farther along than Commerce in addressing similar issues. Business and non-governmental organization experts have been advising entities about pushing more data out to their customers for several years. Commerce wants to take advantage of this expertise as it grapples with the issues involved.

Several barriers exist to making more Commerce data available. They include incompatibility of different information technology systems, multiple data formats and structures, legal and regulatory constraints, and overcoming the general human resistance to change. Each barrier poses a considerable challenge. Together they are daunting. Obtaining advice from experts and people with actual experience in overcoming these barriers will significantly improve Commerce's ability to make more data available and shorten the timeframe Commerce will need to successfully achieve Objective 4.1 in the Department's Strategic Plan -- "Deliver increasing amounts of Commerce data to governments, businesses, and the public in formats that are easier to access and use."

Federal employees do not have the expertise or experience needed to provide advice on the issues involved. The federal government's emphasis on data is a new phenomenon. Big Data and Open Data have been percolating as concepts for a few years, but federal agencies have been slow to respond to them. Commerce is no exception. Our federal employees are experts in their individual fields and excel in collecting, analyzing, and distributing individual data sets, using well-established methodologies and processes. Yet the Government has limited experience in combining data sets on a large scale and

breaking down barriers to integrating data. This carries over to the Department's somewhat individually unique and frequently difficult-to-use data dissemination platforms. Outside experts – by virtue of not working in federal agencies – bring fresh perspectives. Moreover, the experts Commerce seeks to include as members of the C-DAC will include those who have actually achieved results in making diverse big data assets available to their customers.

None of the charters of existing Commerce advisory committees are broad enough to encompass the specific work expected of the C-DAC. The C-DAC is intended to address data issues that cut across the Commerce Department, to make Commerce data easier to find, access, use, and combine. A review of the advisory committees currently supporting Commerce's production of weather, climatic, economic, demographic, and other data revealed that none are sufficiently inclusive enough to address the broad issue of improving data management and dissemination across the Department.

- The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) has seven advisory committees.¹ Each is focused on a specific scientific topic; none would be suitable for addressing Commerce data as a whole.
- The National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST) is supported by a National Construction Safety Team Advisory Committee. Its charter is focused on construction standards and investigations.²
- The Economic and Statistics Administration is supported by the Federal Economic Statistics Advisory Committee. This committee is charged with advising the directors of the Bureau of Labor Statistics, the Bureau of Economic Analysis, and the Census Bureau on “statistical methodology and other technical matters related to the collection, tabulation, and analysis of federal economic statistics.”³
- Bureau of Economic Affairs (BEA) is supported by the Bureau of Economic Analysis Advisory Committee. This committee is charged with providing advice on matters “related to the development and improvement of BEA’s national, industry, international, and regional economic accounts.”⁴
- The Census Bureau is supported by two committees:
 - The Scientific Advisory Committee is charged with providing advice on “census policies, research and methodology, tests, operations, communications/messaging, and other activities to ascertain needs and

¹ A brief description of each of the seven committees is found on NOAA’s website, http://www.corporateservices.noaa.gov/ames/federal_advisory_committee. Individual charters for each committee can be accessed by clicking on the relevant link.

² The charter for this NIST advisory committee is found at http://www.nist.gov/el/disasterstudies/ncst/ncst_charter.cfm.

³ The Federal Economic Statistics Advisory Committee’s charter is found at http://www.census.gov/fesac/pdf/FESAC_CharterRenewal_Signed_102012.pdf.

⁴ See 68 F.R. 48336 (Aug. 13, 2003).

- best practices to improve censuses, surveys, operations and programs.”⁵
- The purpose of the Census Bureau’s National Advisory Committee on Racial, Ethnic, and Other Populations is similar to the Scientific Advisory Committee except that it specifically examines “such areas as hidden households, language barriers, students and youth, aging populations, American Indian and Alaskan Native tribal considerations, new immigrant populations, populations affected by natural disasters, highly mobile and migrant populations, complex households, poverty, race/ethnic distribution, privacy and confidentiality, rural populations and businesses, individuals and households with limited access to information and communications technologies, the dynamic nature of new businesses, minority ownership of businesses, as well as other concerns impacting Census survey design and implementation.”⁶

The C-DAC will provide the insight and course direction necessary to meet the opportunities and challenges associated with the growth and availability of Commerce data as whole. It will not be limited to one specific type of data or meeting the advisory needs of one particular agency within Commerce.

⁵ The Scientific Advisory Committee’s charter is found at https://www.census.gov/cac/census_scientific_advisory_committee/docs/cacpa-charter.pdf.

⁶ The National Advisory Committee on Racial, Ethnic, and Other Populations’ charter is found at https://www.census.gov/cac/race_ethnic_advisory_committees/docs/nac-charter.pdf.